



# Islam and Muslim Minorities in Austria: Historical Context and Current Challenges of Integration

Zeynep Sezgin<sup>1</sup> 

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## Abstract

European nations face a paradox. On the one hand, anti-terrorism and security concerns push them to compromise the religious liberties of Muslims and to restrict the practice of Islam in public space. On the other hand, these countries seek to regulate, institutionalise and give representation to (i.e. ‘Europeanise’) Islam, and to facilitate the socioeconomic integration of Muslim minorities. At the same time, the public visibility of Islam has rekindled discussions concerning the nature and content of European secularism, unintentionally giving rise to secular populist movements and Islamophobia. Using Austria as a case study, this paper frames this paradoxical development within its oft-neglected historical legal context. Particularly, it reviews how the country’s history and its legacy have shaped the inclusionary model of religious governance in Austria and Muslim associative life. It then examines how the integration of Muslims in Austria has been challenged by the exclusionary model of citizenship, Islamophobia, xenophobia and discrimination. Finally, it describes the securitisation and recent policy changes towards Islam and Muslims and how these deviate from the historical legal context, compromising the religious liberties of Muslims and restricting Islam from public space.

**Keywords** Institutionalisation and representation of Islam · Securitisation and politicisation of Islam · Muslim minorities · Integration · Austria

## Introduction

The presence of Islam and Muslim minorities in Western countries has attracted increasing academic, public and political attention in the post-9/11 world. Unfortunately, followers of Islam are often portrayed as a monolithic bloc that is different from or is

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✉ Zeynep Sezgin  
zeynep.sezgin@univie.ac.at

<sup>1</sup> Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna, Sensengasse 3, Stiege 2, Tür 2, 1090 Vienna, Austria

even hostile to ‘the West’, which is generally viewed as Christian, secular, liberal and democratic. In other words, Islam is used as a label to indicate and fulfil notions of ‘self versus otherness’. Without doubt, describing the Islamic and Western worlds as two contradictory poles has led to a dualistic interpretation of their relationship that disregards the many nuances and exceptions of each and the internal heterogeneity of both (Gündüz 2007).

Similarly, Muslim minorities in Europe have increasingly been placed at the centre of discussions about national identity and the professed failure of attempts at integration. Members of this group are thought to be perpetrators of insecurity, being blamed in particular for threatening social stability, economic prosperity and the Western cultural–normative ‘way of life’. In some cases, they are even accused of being ‘foreign enemies’ who finance, participate in, or otherwise support terrorist networks. With the increasing flow of asylum seekers from mainly Muslim countries during the past 5 years, as well as the more recent Islamist terror attacks in Europe, such suspicions have gathered momentum. New policies and laws related to anti-terrorism and enhanced security have been introduced to deal with potential threats associated with Muslim migration, even in those countries where Muslims had initially been well-integrated citizens who were regarded as an asset.

European nations face a paradox. On the one hand, anti-terrorism and security concerns push them to compromise the religious liberties of Muslims and to restrict the practice of Islam in public space. On the other hand, these countries seek to regulate, institutionalise and give representation to (i.e. ‘Europeanise’) Islam, and to facilitate the socioeconomic integration of Muslim minorities (Sezgin and Rosenow 2013). At the same time, the public visibility of Islam has rekindled discussions concerning the nature and content of European secularism, unintentionally giving rise to secular populist movements and Islamophobia (Cesari 2009).

Austria provides a perfect example for this paradoxical development and is used as a case study in this paper. Already in 1912, Austria legally recognised Islam as a state religion and in 1979 it acknowledged the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, IGGiÖ) as the official representative for all Muslims in this country, giving Muslims the same rights as other legally recognised religious communities (i.e. Protestant, Catholic and Jewish). Yet, the Islam Law of 2015 shows a recent change in this exemplary model of recognition. This paper frames this development within its oft-neglected historical legal context, thus demonstrating how history can inform and help explain contemporary debates regarding Islam and Muslim minorities. It also discusses how far-right parties have increasingly employed Islamophobic populism to gain votes and how central parties have joined the fray, causing an important change in the long-standing governmental policies towards Islam (Hafez and Heinisch 2018).

Not all Muslims feel adequately represented by the IGGiÖ, and disagreement about its power and legitimacy prevails within the Muslim community in Austria (Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013). In addition, there are strong ties between citizenship and access to social, economic and political rights, whereas religious rights and privileges in Austria, such as state-funded religious instruction in public schools and the provision of traditional Islamic care practices (e.g. medical, military and family services), are disassociated from citizenship. This means that non-naturalised Muslim migrants are granted far-reaching religious rights even though they are often denied social, economic

and political rights. Moreover, although the legal recognition of Islam includes these various religious rights and privileges, which in many ways makes life easier for Muslims in Austria, it does not prevent discrimination against, and harassment of Muslims, or the politicisation and securitisation of Islam in the country.

This paper addresses these issues in six sections. First, it provides a review of the current state of the research regarding Islam and Muslim minorities in Austria. Second, it provides demographic and historical information about Muslims in Austria. Third, it reviews how the country's history and its legacy—starting with the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and continuing through the corporatist tradition of interest representation in modern Austria—have shaped the inclusionary model of religious governance in Austria and Muslim associative life. Fourth, it examines how the integration of Muslims in Austria has been challenged by the exclusionary model of citizenship. Fifth, it illustrates how the image of Islam and the integration of Muslims are burdened by Islamophobia, xenophobia and discrimination, further jeopardising attempts at integration. Sixth, it discusses the politicisation of Islam. Finally, it describes the securitisation and recent policy changes towards Islam and Muslims and how these deviate from the historical legal context, compromising the religious liberties of Muslims and restricting Islam from public space.

## Current State of the Research

Over the past 15 years, the academic literature addressing Islam and Muslims in Austria has grown and includes works such as Janda and Vogl's *Islam in Österreich* (Islam in Austria) (2010); Heine, Lohlker, and Potz's *Muslimen in Österreich: Geschichte, Lebenswelt, Religion: Grundlagen für den Dialogue* (Muslims in Austria: History, Life-world, Religion: Foundations for the Dialogue) (2012); Hafez's *Muslim Protest against Austria's Islam law* (2017a); and Dautovic and Hafez's *Institutionalising Islam in Contemporary Austria* (2018).<sup>1</sup> In addition, various works have addressed Muslims and Islam on a European scale, often through collections of country-by-country case studies, and include chapters on the Austrian case study.<sup>2</sup>

Although studies of Islam and Muslims in Austria focus on a variety of demographic, historical, political, economic and legal aspects, most of them address the integration of Islam and Muslims, with references to Islamism, 'parallel societies' (Parallelgesellschaften), the discrimination and harassment of Muslims, prejudice and violence against Muslims, xenophobia and Islamophobia, and various conflicts surrounding mosque construction and headscarves. Another cluster of studies addresses the reasons for the professed failure of integration and discusses directly or indirectly the compatibility of Islam with the West. These studies offer the following explanations for the difficulty facing European societies with respect to integrating their Muslim

<sup>1</sup> See also Bischof et al. (2005); Sticker (2008); Dokumentationsstelle für Muslimen in Österreich (2015); Bauer (2016); Hafez (2018).

<sup>2</sup> These include book chapters on Austria, such as 'Islam in Austria' (Kroissenbrunner 2002), 'Religious Citizenship versus Politics of Migrant Integration: The Case of Austria' (Rosenberger and Mourao Permoser 2009), 'Integration and Representation of Islam in Austria and Germany' (Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013) and 'Islam and Muslims in Austria' (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015). See also Wodak et al. (2003), Mourao Permoser, Rosenberger, and Stoeckl (2011), Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou (2012), Schmidinger and Cakir (2014), and Wieshaider (2004).

minorities: (1) the liberal identity of European states and the illiberal threat Islam might pose to it (Hansen 2011); (2) the challenge of accommodating and regulating Islam in secular Europe (Joppke 2013); (3) Europe's unwillingness to adapt predominantly Christian settings to religious pluralism (Foner and Alba 2008); (4) the treatment of 'Muslim' as a racialised category that designates a 'visible other' in relation to white Europeans in a 'colour-blind' Europe (El-Tayeb 2011: 16); (5) the rise of far-right parties and party competition to monopolise the issue of Islam (Hafez and Heinisch 2018). Another area of research analyses Muslim organisations and their role in the political claims-making and civic/religious participation of migrants (Waldrauch and Sohler 2004; Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013; Mattes and Rosenberger 2015).

Instead of a couple of exceptions like Hafez and Heinisch (2018), these studies on Islam and Muslims in Austria have often failed to frame current and ongoing events, as well as academic, public and political debates within their historical context. Specifically, they ignore the paradoxically centripetal relationship between this context (i.e. the inclusionary model of religious governance), and current legal changes and their political justifications that compromise the liberties of Muslims and exclude Islam from the public space. Similarly, only a small number of studies have focused on the tension between the recognition of Islam as an official religion (i.e. an organised religious body along with the religious rights and privileges connected with this status), and the growing resentment towards Muslims and Islam in Austria.

By considering the historical context and the current challenges to integration, this paper contributes to our understanding of Islam and Muslim minorities in Austria. More specifically, it links the country's historical legal legacy (i.e. the inclusionary model of religious governance and the exclusionary model of citizenship) to recent and ongoing events (i.e. the securitisation of Islam and Muslim minorities in the post-9/11 world), which are equally important for understanding the current successes and challenges of integrating Islam and Muslims in the country.

## Muslims in Austria: History and Demographics

During the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Austria obtained the right to occupy and rule the Ottoman province of Bosnia–Herzegovina. In this way, the Habsburgs came into possession of a colony containing 60,000 Muslims (Kogelmann 1999: 318). After the empire collapsed at the end of the First World War, Austria's Muslim population was reduced to a few hundred (Kern 2015). In the 1950s, Austria was a predominantly Roman Catholic country with only small religious minority communities. At the time of the 1951 census, 89% of the population considered themselves to be Roman Catholic, 6.2% Protestant and 3.8% non-denominational (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015: 130).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of Muslims began to increase again as a result of Austria's post–Second World War economic boom and the growing demand for labour. Austria then entered bilateral agreements with southern and south-eastern European countries, including Turkey (1964) and Yugoslavia (1966), to recruit the so-called guest workers. Over time, this influx led to significant numbers of these workers and their families settling in Austria. In 1969, the number of foreign workers from Turkey and Yugoslavia stood at about 76,500; by 1973, this number had almost tripled, to around 227,000 (Kraler and Stacher 2002).

With the oil crisis and the ensuing recession in 1973, the demand for guest workers was radically reduced. Recruitment ended, access to employment was restricted and in 1975, the Aliens Employment Act (*Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz*) was passed. As a consequence, the number of foreign employees (and residents) dropped to a point where, by 1985, the employment of Yugoslav and Turkish citizens in Austria was at half the level it had been in 1973.

Although active labour recruitment was discontinued, other forms of migration, such as family reunification, started to play a more important role. In addition, in the 1990s, Austria opened its borders to about 110,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) who had either fled or been expelled from their home countries during the hostilities that began in 1991. Most of these refugees (about 90,000) were Bosnian Muslims (UNHCR [n.d.](#)). In 2015, Austria once again became one of the ten major destinations for asylum seekers worldwide and received 88,340 asylum applications (UNHCR [2014](#)). Most of these asylum seekers came from Muslim countries, including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and Somalia (Statistik Austria [2015](#)).

In Austria, Islam as a religious denomination was first included as a category in the 1971 census survey, which registered 0.3% of the population as Muslim. By the 1991 census, this number had increased to 2%, and in the 2001 census to 4.2%, when about 350,000 individuals designated Islam as their religious affiliation. However, after this date, religious denomination has no longer been surveyed, so the size of the current Muslim population in Austria can only be estimated. According to the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), there were about half a million Muslims in 2009 in Austria, constituting approximately 6% of the country's population (Janda and Vogl [2010](#)) whereas this number had increased to 700,000 Muslims in 2017, representing about 8% of the population (Goujon et al. [2017](#)).

The vast majority of Muslims residing in Austria are Sunnis (85%), followed by Shiites (12%); and Alevis, Ahmadis and other Islamic groups make up smaller percentages (Sticker [2008](#)). In 2009, Turkish people constituted the largest group among Muslims living in Austria (about 109,000, or 21% of Muslims), followed by about 52,000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina (10%), around 34,000 from Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo (7%) and circa 18,000 Russian nationals (4%) (Janda and Vogl [2010](#)). The number of naturalisations has increased significantly, especially in recent years among Turks and Bosnians. As of 15 May 2001, only 28% of Muslims had Austrian citizenship, whereas by 2009, almost half of Muslims in Austria were Austrian citizens (Mattes and Rosenberger [2015](#)).

## The Inclusionary Model of Religious Governance and the IGGiÖ

As noted previously, Islam is an official religion and organised religious body in Austria, making Austria unique among the Western European countries in this respect. Islam's status in Austria can be traced back to the early legislative recognition of this denomination. First, the Constitution of 1867 (*Staatsgrundgesetz 1867*) guaranteed respect for all religions throughout the Empire, giving Muslims the right to establish mosques and practise their religion (Schmied [2005](#)).

Second, the Law of Recognition of 1874 (*Anerkennungsgesetz 1874*) gave Muslims additional rights and privileges, including the right to organise and manage their community affairs independently through municipal councils and to establish Islamic endowment funds (Heine, Lohlker and Potz 2012). These rights and privileges were enhanced further with the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 1919, which assured protection for minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and affirmed the right of each citizen to assume important national positions regardless of religion or ethnic origin (Euro-Islam.info n.d.).

Third, the Islam Law of 1912 (*Islam-Gesetz 1912*) placed Muslims de jure equal to the followers of other officially recognised religious communities and formed the legal basis for recognition of the Islamic community as a corporation of public law (Kogelmann 1999). Specifically, it guaranteed Muslims the right to publicly practise Islam (e.g. Islamic religious education in public schools), to establish confessional institutions (e.g. schools and trusts) and to self-determine internal matters (Schmied 2005). In 1989, the Austrian government amended the Islam Law, which was originally restricted to the Hanafi School, to recognise all Islamic theological schools.

Lately, this legal context was enhanced by the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Belief Communities, which offers religious communities three possible ways to organise, namely (1) as registered societies (*eingetragene Vereine e. V.*), (2) as foundations (*Stiftungen*) and (3) as corporations under public law (*Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts*) (Kogelmann 1999). Religious communities, which were recognised as corporations under public law, were accredited as legal public entities with privileged positions within the Austrian political system. Consequently, several rights were granted to these corporations and to their individual members (Rosenberger and Mourao Permoser 2009: 263).

Despite the convenience of this historical legal context for the Islamic community, no efforts were made to establish an Islamic corporation of public law until the 1960s. During the First World War and with the end of the Habsburg Monarchy, efforts to institutionalise Islam in Austria came to a halt. Beginning in 1932, Islam seemed to flourish again, especially with the founding and development of the Islamic Cultural League, an Islamic non-governmental organisation (NGO). However, after Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany, this organisation was suspended (Heine et al. 2012). During the short period from 1943 to 1948, another Islamic NGO, the Islamic Community of Vienna, came into being and, with the end of the Second World War, the Association of Muslims in Austria was founded. Still, both these organisations focused mainly on religious and charitable issues, and did not play an active role in institutionalising Islam (Bihl 1991: 592).

The first important step towards establishing an Islamic corporation of public law was taken in 1962 with the founding of the Muslim Social Service Association (*Muslimischer Sozialdienst*, MSD) by Muslims from Bosnia–Herzegovina (Kroissenbrunner 2003). MSD supported and consulted Muslims on religious matters and supplied an Islamic infrastructure (prayer rooms, libraries, etc.). This organisation was also the first to apply for recognition of a corporation of public law in 1971, but without success. After the second application in May 1979, Austria's Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture (*Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur*) granted a permit for establishing the 'Islamic Community Vienna' and the 'Islamic Community Austria' (Strobl 1997: 37 ff.). The 'Community of Muslim Believers in



Austria (IGGiÖ)' was founded as a result of these permits in 1979 and has the status of a corporation of public law.

Theoretically, IGGiÖ is recognised as the legitimate representative of all Muslims in Austria, and the Austrian state considers all Muslims to be members of IGGiÖ. In practice, however, there are two types of membership: active and passive. All Muslims are regarded as passive members and are entitled to use the services provided by IGGiÖ. Active members annually pay a €40 membership fee. Only 0.3% of Muslims in Austria pay this amount, and those who do not pay this fee are excluded from the organisation's decision-making process and cannot vote in IGGiÖ elections (Sticker 2008: 11). The main responsibility of IGGiÖ is to provide the state-funded supply of Islamic religious education at Austrian public and private schools. IGGiÖ also has the right to train, hire and supervise imams and religious teachers, even though they are public servants and are paid by the state (Wieshaider 2004: 32). In addition, IGGiÖ provides all services related to Islamic traditions of care (e.g. in hospitals, military service, prisons, marriages and burials in Muslim cemeteries). IGGiÖ is allowed to collect a 'church tax', but it has not yet exercised this privilege (Kogelmann 1999). The organisation's rights also extend to the political arena. When a law considering religious practice is drafted, the government has to consult with legally recognised religious communities, giving them the opportunity to contribute to the legislative process (Hafez and Heinisch 2018).

The rights and privileges of Muslims go beyond the corporate rights of IGGiÖ. The Working Restriction Law (*Arbeitsruhegesetz*), for example, allows workers to take time off for religious prayers as long as this practice does not disturb others (Kalb et al. 2003: 115). In addition, Article 14 of the Austrian Constitution and Article 9 of the Human Rights Convention protect the right of Muslim students to wear a headscarf (Rosenberger and Mourao Permoser 2009). Muslim students in Austria do not have to attend classes during their religious holidays and also have the right to Islamic religious education in public schools, provided that their numbers warrant it (Kroissenbrunner 2003). Muslim students are exempt from attending religious education if their numbers are small and do not justify a separate class.<sup>3</sup>

## Corporatist Austria

The privileged situation granted to Islam is the result not only of the previously mentioned historical legal legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (i.e. the inclusionary model of religious governance) but also of the corporatist tradition of interest representation in Austria (Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013; Mattes and Rosenberger 2015; Hafez and Heinisch 2018). Austria is a centrally organised corporatist state. In fact, it is often thought of as having the 'strongest' corporatist institutions in Europe (Wiarda 1997: 73). In order to satisfy collective interests within society, the Austrian state can licence (if not create) corporate entities defined by occupational, functional, ethnic or religious identity; can structure these entities and incorporate them into the

<sup>3</sup> See Wieshaider (2004) and Janda and Vogl (2010) for detailed discussions of the rights of Muslims in Austria, particularly the right to wear a headscarf, to slaughter animals in accordance with Islamic ritual, to build mosques and minarets, and to hold Islamic funeral services.

state system; and can grant these entities representational monopoly and other rights and responsibilities.

Individuals and interest groups in Austria are formally incorporated into the decision-making process through their participation in tightly regulated and officially sanctioned corporate groups. Close ties between these corporate groups and administrative structures ensure a predictable and stable system of interest representation. Consequently, since the 1960s, corporate interest groups—‘social partners’ in Austria (i.e. representatives of state, business, agriculture and labour)—have had decisive influence in major policy areas, including labour, migration and social security (König and Perchinig 2003). Corporate religious organisations, rather than individuals, are perceived as the main religious actors with whom the state cooperates (Rosenberger and Mourao Pemoser 2009). Not only does the Law of Recognition of 1874 ensure (*de jure*) equality of treatment of the followers of all recognised religions (i.e. the same level of rights), but it also establishes institutional cooperation between the state and corporate religious organisations.

## Muslim Associative Life

The founding of an officially recognised institution (IGGiÖ) that offers the privileges outlined in the previous section has not prevented the formation of numerous Islamic organisations in Austria. A significant number of Muslims do not participate in the activities of IGGiÖ and prefer to support alternative social, economic, religious and/or political organisations. For example, Alevis do not associate themselves with IGGiÖ and belong to their own organisation (*Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*, ALEVI), which was recognised as a corporation under public law in 2013. The Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria (*Türkisch Islamische Union für kulturelle und soziale Zusammenarbeit in Österreich*, ATIB), the strongest Muslim organisation in Austria in terms of membership, was established in 1990 and provides religious services for Turkish citizens in Austria. In the past, the ATIB often criticised the IGGiÖ for having anti-democratic structures that do not permit the ATIB to be officially represented in the IGGiÖ. It also criticised the Islamic Academy, which provides religious education, for being dominated by Arabs who, unlike the Turks, constitute a minority within the Muslim community in Austria and whose education, according to the ATIB,<sup>4</sup> was one-sidedly influenced by the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.<sup>5</sup> These and other tensions between ATIB and IGGiÖ have partly been eased in the last years. Especially during the rule of the religious conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), various collaborations have been established

<sup>4</sup> Interview with ATIB representatives

<sup>5</sup> IGGiÖ representatives argue that enabling the membership of organisations would constitute a fundamental disadvantage for Muslims from certain countries who, due to their marginal numbers, have not yet been able to establish large umbrella organisations such as the ATIB. Furthermore, in order to prevent the dominance of a single ethnic group, the IGGiÖ constitution allows no single ethnic group to constitute more than one third of any organ of the IGGiÖ. The IGGiÖ representatives also deny that the Islamic Academy is controlled exclusively by Arabs and draw attention to the Turkish, Austrian and Bosnian members of the ruling committee. They agree, however, that the majority of the teachers are from Arab countries, which is a result of the cooperation agreement concluded with the Al-Azhar University in Egypt for acquiring qualified professors to teach theological subjects (interview with IGGiÖ representatives).



between the two organisations, encouraging the involvement of ATIB members in the IGGiÖ (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015). As a result of this process, Ibrahim Olgun, who was a member of ATIB and acted as the integration commissioner of this organisation between 2013 and 2014, won the IGGiÖ presidential elections in 2016.

Muslim organisations in Austria range from local private clubs to supra-regional organisations, from religious to educational and politically oriented organisations that span the entire political spectrum, and from extreme right to extreme left. While some of the Muslim organisations dissolved shortly after their formation, others experienced a dynamic process of development. Many Muslim organisations began as informal social gatherings, such as Muslim networks and prayer rooms, in the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, some of these Muslim networks, aiming to provide for migrants' religious needs, developed into organisations with enduring, stable and visible vertical and horizontal structures. By the 1990s and 2000s, they formalised their status as professional, and sometimes highly politicised, non-governmental units with different organisational aims, functions and structures (Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013).

In Austria, there are hundreds of Muslim organisations representing various groups within the Muslim community. For practical reasons, Table 1 contains only the largest organisations in terms of membership that have societal and/or political relevance. The majority of these organisations are formed along ethnic, national or regional lines. Those established by Turkish and Bosnian migrants dominate the organisational landscape. Some multi-ethnic/multinational organisations, such as the Muslim Youth of Austria (*Muslimische Jugend Österreich*, MJÖ), have also formed in the last 15 years, but their numbers are still small. Arab Muslims and Muslims from other national backgrounds have formed a series of single, mostly nationally bound organisations in Austria, but these groups have relatively limited societal and political influence (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015), so they are not included in Table 1.

The organisations listed in Table 1 have multiple aims, activities and functions. For example, they help recently arrived immigrants adapt to their new surroundings by cushioning the impact of culture shock; provide a wide range of services to serve migrants' religious, social and cultural needs; assist in the reproduction of migrants' 'cultural capital' and specifically support individual and collective identity-building; and develop their members' 'social capital' and reinforce self-help by establishing networks. Although some organisations continue to present the Austrian government with claims on behalf of Muslim migrants, as Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams (2013) argue, 'the existence of an official representative of Muslim interest[s] in Austria has meant that most of these organisations have chosen to focus their efforts in other areas such as service delivery'.

The Turkish Muslim organisations in Austria and Germany are often connected. For instance, the Islamic Community Millî Görüş (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş*, IGMG) has established numerous organisations in various European countries, including Austria, France, Germany and the Netherlands. However, the IGMG, which has its headquarters in Kerpen, Germany, functions as the central office for all the organisations of IGMG supporters in Europe, including the Islamic Federation and its branches in Austria. A similar structure exists for the VIKZ. Transnational ties also exist among the ATIB and the IZBA; the ATIB is closely related to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, whereas the IZBA is a member not only of the IGGiÖ but also of the Bosnian Islamic Community (*Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini*), the central Muslim organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Table 1** Muslim organisations in Austria

| Nationality of members | Name  | Size and number of branches <sup>a</sup> |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Turkish                | Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria ( <i>Türkisch Islamische Union für kulturelle und soziale Zusammenarbeit in Österreich</i> , ATIB) | 65 branches                              |
|                        | Islamic Federation ( <i>Österreichische Islamische Föderation</i> , IF)   | 38 branches                              |
|                        | Union of Islamic Cultural Centres ( <i>Union Islamischer Kulturzentren in Österreich</i> , VIKZ)  | 43 branches                              |
|                        | Alevi Religious Community in Austria ( <i>Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich</i> , ALEVI)   | About 17,500 registered members          |
| Balkan                 | Union of Bosnian Islamic Associations in Austria ( <i>Verband der bosniakischen islamischen Vereine in Österreich</i> , IZBA)   | 40 branches                              |
|                        | Union of Albanian Muslims in Austria ( <i>Union albanischer Muslime in Österreich</i> , UAMÖ)   | 12 branches                              |
| Multinational          | Islamic Association Ahl-ul-Bayt ( <i>Islamische Vereinigung Ahl-ul Bayt-Verband für die shiitischen Vereine</i> )   | 6 branches                               |
|                        | Initiative of Muslim Austrians ( <i>Initiative muslimische Österreicherinnen und Österreicher</i> , IMÖ)  | 1 branch                                 |
|                        | Muslim Youth of Austria ( <i>Muslimische Jugend in Österreich</i> , MYA)  | No figures available                     |

Sezgin and Rosenow (2013) and Mattes and Rosenberger (2015)

<sup>a</sup> The social scientific literature reports different totals for the number of members in these organisations (see Waldrauch and Sohler 2004; Mattes and Rosenberger 2015). Because of the rapidly changing character of these organisations, the numbers continue to vary. Some of the sympathisers express their affiliations by giving alms (*zakat*) or by attending organisational events or Friday prayers rather than by becoming members or paying membership dues. Moreover, certain Muslim organisations either do not have membership lists or do not make these lists public for political reasons. They might also exaggerate the number of their member unions to gain legitimacy in the eyes of their members, the Austrian and German states, and other NGOs in the organisational field (Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013)

## Intercultural Dialogue

Muslim organisations try to promote a better understanding, and fight discrimination against Muslims by both confronting the negative image of Islam and Muslims in political discourse and organising a number of intercultural dialogues. A major development in this direction was the founding of the Initiative of Muslim Austrians (*Initiative muslimischer ÖsterreicherInnen*, IMÖ) in 2000, which pursues an offensive integration policy that stands for ‘more mutual understanding and tolerance’. The IMÖ follows a twofold path. First, it takes a public stand against the racism and xenophobia that accompanied the radical political change instigated by the FPÖ, and against discrimination against Islam and Muslims in particular. Second, it supports the self-confidence of Muslims and others who still encounter prejudice, rejection and insults (Heine 2005). Attention must also be drawn to the 2003 conference in Graz of directors

of Islamic centres and imams in Europe, during which the participants discussed the development of an authentic Islam in Europe and intercultural dialogue.

The close cooperation between a variety of religious representatives in Austria is also worth mentioning. For instance, when male circumcision was discussed in 2012, Austria's Catholic and Protestant leaders condemned calls to limit the practice and demanded that the government clarify its legality (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015). When a popular initiative was launched in 2013 to abolish the privileged position of religious communities, Austria's Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim leaders organised a joint public appearance. Subsequently, the Pro Religion platform was founded by the legally recognised religious communities to ward off criticism and promote the positive work of such groups (Mattes and Rosenberger 2015: 146).

## Exclusionary Model of Citizenship

Despite Austria's long history of immigration and emigration, its governments have not officially acknowledged Austria as an immigration country (König and Perchinig 2003). In many European countries, third-country nationals (TCNs)<sup>6</sup> are entitled to various social and economic rights, such as social security, social welfare and public benefits. However, in Austria, TCNs are excluded from many of these social and economic rights and benefits.<sup>7</sup> TCNs have also largely been denied political rights, and there are few arrangements for the political integration of migrants.<sup>8</sup> In Austria, naturalisation is the only way for TCNs to acquire certain political rights, such as the right to vote in local, state and national elections. The Austrian citizenship regime (*jus sanguinis*, or citizenship by descent) is exclusionary; migrants can be naturalised only if they have legally resided in Austria for at least 10 years, can read and write in German, show loyalty to the Republic of Austria, and do not endanger the public peace, order or security.

Since the implementation of the immigration law package (*Fremdenrechtspaket*) of 2002 and 2005, further obstacles have been put in place, such as mandatory integration courses and cultural tests (Rosenberger and Mourao Permoser 2009: 261). The exclusionary citizenship regime and the restrictions on social, economic and political rights, as well as the social discrimination, xenophobia and Islamophobia to be discussed next,

<sup>6</sup> Of the Muslims in Austria, 51% are TCNs (Janda and Vogl 2010).

<sup>7</sup> In three of the nine Austrian states, TCNs do not have the legal right to subsistence aid, and the benefits they receive are lower than those of citizens. In all the states, the residence permit of temporary migrants may not be renewed if they apply for social assistance. Family assistance (*Familienbeihilfe*) is given to foreigners in accordance with their access to the labour market or to those with 5 years of legal residence. Supportive study grants and grants for successful students are given exclusively to Austrian students. TCNs can access public housing if they can prove that their income does not exceed certain limits and that there is an emergency situation. In six of the nine states, rental assistance is denied to TCNs. In addition, TCNs are excluded from subsidies, which can be used to buy or build houses or flats in Austria (Fix and Laglagaron 2002; Waldrauch and Sohler 2004).

<sup>8</sup> They are banned from voting in local, state and national elections. TCNs cannot even vote in the elections of work councils and labour unions because they do not have passive voting rights. The political integration of migrants is facilitated by advisory boards for foreigners (*Ausländerbeiräte*) in a few Austrian communities including Graz, Linz, Steyr, Schwechat, Kufstein, Kapfenberg and Leoben. These advisory boards can make suggestions only to the municipal councils in order to represent foreigners' interests and improve foreigner politics and policies that cater to migrants.

contradict the existing inclusionary model of religious governance in Austria and are the most important obstacles to integration (König and Perchinig 2003; Sezgin and Rosenow-Williams 2013).

## Social Discrimination, Xenophobia and Islamophobia

On 7 March 2005, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) released a report entitled 'Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in the EU: Developments since September 11', which revealed increasing distrust of, and enmity and prejudice towards, Muslims, and presented media reports portraying Muslims as 'aliens' to and 'enemies' of Europe, verbal and physical acts of violence against Muslims, prejudice in employment, the hostile political slogans of rightist parties, and negative immigration measures. Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director of the Institute, stated, 'as the fight against terrorism has been stepped up and the perceived threat of religious extremism has become a major focus of public debate, pre-existing patterns of prejudice and discrimination have been reinforced and Muslims have increasingly felt that they are stigmatised because of their beliefs' (IHF 2005).

The situation in Austria is no different. The rights and privileges of Muslims and the recognition of Islam as an official religion and organised religious body do not guarantee societal acceptance of Muslims and Islam in Austria. Even as early as 2001, 24.7% of the Austrian population did not want Muslims as their neighbours; only 'gypsies' were less popular (38.5%) (Heine 2005). Likewise, in 2015, the Eurobarometer, the public opinion survey of the European Commission, revealed that Austria is at the top of the list of European countries where people feel uncomfortable working with a Muslim, or having a daughter or son in a relationship with a Muslim (European Commission 2015).

Intolerance towards and discrimination against Muslims is nothing new in Austria, but manifestations of these phenomena appear to have been on the rise in recent years. Islamophobic groups in Austria have been capitalising on public concerns, and the number of anti-Muslim campaigns organised by right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis have increased. Beate Winkler, Director of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in Vienna, argued that the events of the past few years have increasingly created 'an atmosphere in which Muslims must constantly defend themselves and explain that they are not terrorists' (Euro-islam.info. n.d.). Similarly, in his speech to the *Nationalrat* (the lower house of the Austrian Parliament) in 2016, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his concern over 'growing xenophobia' (Reuters 2016).

According to the first anti-Muslim racism report, there were 156 assaults against Muslims in Austria in 2015 (Dokumentationsstelle für Muslime in Österreich 2015). About 95% of the incidents were aimed at women, and about 40% of the assaults involved verbal attacks, 12% were physical attacks and 5% involved discrimination. The report shows that the particular targets of public insults and discrimination were women dressed in traditional Islamic clothing when they were seeking employment. In addition, Austrian security authorities recorded 1156 criminal acts committed by right-wing extremist, xenophobic/racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic groups in 2015, as compared with 750 in 2014, an increase of 54.1% (BVT 2015).

Whether intentionally or not, the media fuels racist debates by responding to the public's fears of unwanted migration. Commonly covered topics include the construction of mosques with domes and minarets,<sup>9</sup> the ritual slaughter of animals, the wearing of headscarves, and incidents of Muslim girls refusing to attend physical education class and swimming lessons. Another major debate in the media focuses on home-grown jihadism and crimes committed by people with a migration background, and on migrants and asylum seekers and, in turn, on the integration of Muslims in general. News of terrorist attacks or violent Islamic activism around the world also enjoys broad media coverage.

## Politicisation of Islam

The issue of Islam is becoming more and more politicised in the Austrian public space owing to the rise of the far-right Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ). Experts see the 1999 national elections as a turning point, when FPÖ started a populist campaign against migrants (*Ausländerwahlkampf*), subtly instrumentalising popular fears of Islam by showing pictures of women in headscarves and promoting slogans such as 'Stop Foreign Infiltration' (*Stopp der Überfremdung*) (Euro-islam.info. n.d.). Since then, the FPÖ has made Islamophobia one of its central strategies in an attempt to mobilise the electorate (Bayrakli and Hafez 2015). For example, as part of the FPÖ's election campaign in Styria during the 2010 parliamentary elections, an anti-Muslim online computer game with the provocative title 'Bye bye Mosque' (*Moschee Baba*) was launched. The game gave players 60 seconds to collect points by placing a target over cartoon mosques, minarets and Muslims, and clicking on a stop sign. Before inviting players to vote for the FPÖ's candidate, Gerhard Kurzmann, the screen displayed the message 'Game over. Styria is now full of minarets and mosques'. During the past 10 years, FPÖ slogans have become increasingly radicalised (for example, one read '[Prophet] Muhammad is a child abuser and an epileptic') and have been combined with policy demands for the surveillance of mosques and a review of Islam's legal status as an officially recognised religious community (Bayrakli and Hafez 2015: 26).

Other political parties have reacted FPÖ's efforts to monopolise the issue of Islam in different ways. The Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, SPÖ) have been struggling to reconcile its 'tradition of secularism and distance from any kind of religion, especially "foreign" ones, with their stance on multiculturalism and sociocultural tolerance. Unable to successfully handle and negotiate opposing ideological positions and recognising the potentially divisive nature of the Islam issue ... the SPÖ blurred its position,' leaving space for a competition between FPÖ and other parties over the Islam issue (Heinisch and Hafez 2018: 661). Alternatively, the (Christian) conservative Austrian People's Party's (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, ÖVP) has increasingly referred to the Islam issue in order to appeal to a wider cross-section of voters on the right and as a co-governing party, it was 'able to implement several of their policy demands and thus had an advantage over the FPÖ in opposition, which could do little more than "talk" about the issues. As such the ÖVP became the primary driving force behind the creation and implementation of the Islam Act of 2015' (ibid: 661).

<sup>9</sup> The provincial government of Carinthia, for example, passed a law in 2008 effectively banning the construction of mosques or minarets (Euro-islam.info. n.d.).

## Institutionalised Islamophobia, the Paradigm Shift in the Policies Towards the Securitisation of Islam

The Islam Law of 2015 seeks to regulate the external legal relationships of the officially recognised Islamic religious communities (IGGiÖ, the ALEVI and other Islamic religious communities in future) in one act. Yet, ‘there is no justified explanation of why it is necessary to include other religious communities in an act originally pertaining to the IGGiÖ’ and the regulation seems arbitrary given that the external legal relationships of religious communities who see themselves as ‘Christian’ are not regulated with one act (Dautovic and Hafez 2018: 14). It seems that the law aims to ‘regulate all questions of religion law (especially the provisions on the recognition procedure) only as they apply to Muslims, therefore separating them from the general religion law,’ which apply to all other legally recognised religious communities (ibid: 16).

Although the Austrian government argued that the new law treated all religious communities equally, oppositional members of parliament from the Greens and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS) voiced concern that the new law on Islam would reflect a ‘general suspicion’ of Muslims (Bayrakli and Hafez 2015: 27). In a similar way, various members of the Muslim civil society such as MJÖ and the Muslim Civil Society Network (*Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft*, NMZ); IGGiÖ; legal scholars (Pötz and Schinkele 2014); and social scientists (Dautovic and Hafez 2018) criticised the Islam Law of 2015 for being anti-constitutional and discriminatory towards the Muslim minority (Hafez 2017b). At the other end of the spectrum, the FPÖ opposed the law, deeming it ineffective in curbing extremism.

Some of the critiques have merit.<sup>10</sup> The Islam Law of 2015 requires a description of the religious teachings, including a text of the essential faith sources (Koran), ‘which must differ from existing legally recognised religious societies, confessional communities or religious societies’ and the constitution of the Islamic religious community to be written ‘in official language’ (Dautovic and Hafez 2018).<sup>11</sup> There is no similar regulation for any other legally recognised religious community and this makes the Islam Law of 2015 incompatible with the constitutional principles of equal treatment (Gleichheitssatz) and parity (Paritätsprinzip). Moreover, Section 23(1) and (3) of the Islam Act of 2015 makes the validity of the constitution of the Islamic religious community dependent on the permission of the Federal Chancellor and ‘gives the latter a de facto veto on questions of Islamic religious teachings and even the Koran’ (ibid: 18). Yet, such a provision clearly contradicts the autonomy of legally recognised religious societies according to Article 15 StGG 1867.

Additionally, the law bans Islamic religious societies, and their cultus communities and members from receiving funding from outside Austria for usual activities for the satisfaction of religious needs of their members. The ban appears to be aimed specifically at Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which have exported their competing versions of

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed analysis and critique of the Islam Law 2015, see Dautovic and Hafez (2018).

<sup>11</sup> The draft version of the new Islam Law, which demanded that teachings (including the text of essential sources for the faith: the Koran) be written ‘in German language’, was criticised by various actors including IGGiÖ, which argued that there could not be any official or canonical translations of the Koran. As a result in the Islam Law of 2015, ‘in the German language’ was removed and substituted with ‘in official language’ (Dautovic and Hafez 2018).



Islam to Austria for decades. Saudi Arabia has financed the construction of mosques in Austria and has operated schools and cultural centres there, and about 60 Muslim clerics currently working in Austria are employed by Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, Diyanet) as Turkish civil servants (Kern 2016).

Foreign funding is not banned for any other legally recognised religious community. Quite the contrary, the Russian Orthodox Church receives money directly from Moscow, and the Union of Free Pentecostal Churches receives money from the United States (Bell 2014) and according to the s 2 Protestants Act of 1961, 'the Protestant Church is granted the freedom to cooperate with domestic or foreign churches and religious societies' (ibid: 18). Different treatment regarding the foreign funding makes the Islam Law of 2015 incompatible with the principles of equal treatment and parity.

The government argues that freezing foreign revenue streams is the best way to encourage the development of an independent Austrian Islam. In this respect, the then Minister of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (*Bundesminister für Europa, Integration und Äußeres*) Sebastian Kurz, told the Austrian public service broadcaster ORF: 'We want an Austrian form of Islam. Every Muslim in Austria should be able to practice his religion properly, but we don't want influence and control from outside' (Bell 2014). Yet, 'until now this provision has evidenced almost no impact (which may change) and seems to have been no more than a populist tactic' (Dautovic and Hafez 2018: 19).

The Islam Law of 2015 marks an important contrast to corporatist traditions of interest representation and is not the only manifestation of the institutionalised Islamophobia. In 2016, Austria adopted one of Europe's toughest asylum laws, which allows the government to declare a state of emergency if the inflow of asylum seekers threatens the country's 'national security'. Border authorities will now grant access only to those asylum seekers whose safety in a neighbouring transit country is threatened or whose relatives are already in Austria. The government also announced a limit on the number of asylum seekers it will accept in 2016 (37,500), which is less than half the number it accepted in 2015. In addition, a whole new set of security measures concerning the entry, detention and deportation of asylum seekers has been introduced. The perception of asylum seekers as perpetrators of insecurity has been both the cause and the justification for this new set of measures and the securitisation of Austria's asylum policies. In turn, policy changes have increased the general public's suspicions of asylum seekers, and have intensified and created fertile ground for intolerance, stereotypes (cognitive bias), prejudice (emotional bias) and discrimination (behavioural bias) along socially constructed categories. Moreover, the rates of criminal acts by right-wing extremist, xenophobic/racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic groups have drastically increased (Dokumentationsstelle für Muslime in Österreich 2015).

Securitisation encompasses not only asylum policies, but also migration policies and citizenship, and influences the discourse concerning Islamic practices (e.g. the wearing of the hijab and the burqa). In this regard, securitisation reinforces the perception of Islam and Muslims as 'others within the West'. Consequently, Muslims are confronted with increased political scrutiny and control, especially those who assert their religious affiliation by engaging in public religious activities. Signs of these activities, such as the presence of mosques and minarets, have also become highly suspect. Under these conditions, not only are radical groups seen as a threat, but all visible aspects of the Islamic religion are met with distrust and discrimination (Cesari 2009).

## Conclusion

The legal historical context helps us to understand and explain the integration of Islam and Muslim minorities in Austria. Integrating Muslims in Austria has always been a challenge because of the tension between the exclusionary model of citizenship and the inclusionary model of religious governance. This situation has become more complex due to secularisation and recent policy changes that deviate from the inclusionary model by both compromising the religious liberties of Muslims and restricting Islam in the public space.

As previously discussed, Islam has achieved the status of a corporation of public law, and Muslims are granted a variety of religious rights. The IGGiÖ was established long before Islam became a politicised issue and has been serving for over 35 years as the legitimate representative of all Muslims in Austria. However, as the Austrian case shows, integration cannot be achieved through religious policies alone. About half of the Muslims in Austria are TCNs and have been largely denied political rights and, for them, naturalisation is the only way to acquire such rights. Yet the Austrian citizenship regime is exclusionary and the right to citizenship can only be applied after 10 years of residence and by fulfilling certain criteria, including participation in mandatory integration courses and cultural knowledge tests. Moreover, legal rights and privileges of Muslims do not guarantee their social acceptance. As is the case in other European countries, the image of Islam and Muslims in Austria is plagued with prejudice and Islamophobia. In addition, xenophobic, Islamophobic and discriminatory acts against Muslims have been on the rise in recent years and are likely to increase even more as far-right parties, Islamophobic groups and the media continue to exploit tensions over the refugee crisis.

Muslims in Europe occupy an important, yet precarious, position between ‘the Islamic world’ and ‘the West’, and have enormous potential to bridge the divide between these increasingly perceived polarised societies. Yet Muslims can reach their full potential only if they are allowed to enjoy social, economic and political rights, as well as the full protection of the law, and if they receive equal treatment. The legal status of Muslims in Austria is unique in Europe but the denial of political rights and the problems they experience in social acceptance is not. Academic, public and political debates surrounding national identity and security, questions concerning Islam’s compatibility with the West, the rise of far-right political parties, categorisations of Muslims as ‘the other’ and legal and policy changes, such as the new Austrian Law on Islam and the French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols,<sup>12</sup> can be observed in various European countries and all show that there is still a long way to go until equal treatment is achieved.

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<sup>12</sup> French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols bans Islamic headscarves and other visible religious symbols in public schools.

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